

JULY 30, 1964

FOIAb3b

Culp as a 'Tennis Bum' (Really, a Secret Agent)

By Richard K. Doan
TV and Radio Editor

Another of TV's former Western heroes is about to switch to a sort of James Bond life.

Robert Culp, who five years ago was the Texas Ranger in CBS's "Trackdown," has been tabbed for the starring role in an untitled new hour weekly drama for NBC about a world-ranging "tennis bum" who is in reality an undercover agent for an intelligence agency.

It is expected that Negro comic Bill Cosby will be signed to portray another college - graduated secret agent who disguises himself as Culp's Man Friday.

The series will be produced by Sheldon Leonard, Danny Thomas' producer-partner, and will be shot "on location" in many foreign locales. The pilot episode will be filmed in Hong Kong.

Discussing the project yesterday, Mort Werner, NBC-TV's vice-president in charge of programming, waved an arm. "We believe we've got to break down the studio walls," he said. "Sheldon came to us recently and said, 'Let's do a series, all over the world, about a man whose work takes him all over the world. Let's pick locations, then write stories with those locales.'" NBC thought it was a fine idea, Werner reported.

The NBC official ticked off Tokyo, Athens and Rome as some of the proposed sites of Culp's fictional adventures.

Leonard and a studio team will leave Aug. 12 for Hong Kong to begin preparation of the pilot.

Culp has been working lately mostly in movies. He portrayed Ensign Barney Ross in "PT-109" and, more recently, "Wild Bill" Hickok, the early-day Kansas sheriff, in "The Raiders."

Growing interest by the networks in tongue - in - cheek, "high-styled" murder mystery and adventure drama is attributed in part at least to the success of ABC's "Burke's Law," the star of which, Gene Barry, saw duty in TV's Western heyday as Bat Masterson.

James Bond, the Ian Fleming character, himself has not yet arrived on the TV screen, but NBC is coming on this fall with a reasonable facsimile of same in "The Man from U.N.C.L.E.," starring Robert Vaughn. NBC's "The Rogues," with David Niven and Charles Boyer, beginning in September, also will be somewhat in this genre.

The new NBC series starring Culp is aimed at the 1965-'66 season, more than a year away.

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT